

Taunia Gorka
Hearing on Responding to Long-term Unemployment

June 10, 2010

The Honorable:

It is now the fourth night in a row and I am still unable to sleep as Congress continues to hash out how to pay for extended unemployment benefits. Something that should have been addressed back in May and it is now June and there seems to be little progress made. While I know that I am not alone in my insomnia, it does not bring comfort to know that I am just one of the many who are sitting up this night with a sense of doom. What to do when my own regular unemployment benefits end this summer and I have still not been able to secure a position and unemployment is still the highest it has ever been. Will I qualify for the Tiers or are they a thing of the past?

I'm beginning to think that Congress does not understand the internal panic and uncertainty that millions of unemployed are experiencing. I can pray, hope for the best, or just "wing it" with the best of them. That seems to be the approach that Congress is taking by passing these one month extensions when everyone knows that the economy is going to take some time to recover. I do not understand this belief that we can take short-term solutions to try and solve long-term problems. Where we are today isn't something that took a few months to create. It was many years of neglect, greed, and lack of appropriate government oversight in a number of our key industries. We all need to acknowledge and accept a certain amount of blame for our complacency for the last 10-15 years, but it is not right that the average American should be the biggest casualty in all this when they need assistance now.

While my own situation isn't dismal, at present, I recognize that it can be. Over the last two years, I have laid individuals off and watched grown men cry and beg for their jobs. They are scared and worried about finding a new position when no one is hiring. I have heard and personally know of individuals who can not afford to make their mortgage payments, pay their utilities, go to the doctor, buy gas, purchase food, or continue to pay the Internet bill to allow them to continue to look for a job. They feel defeated and know that you are going to take away the one source of survival they have left.

As a taxpayer who paid in \$38,000 plus this year, I am disappointed in the fact that Congress is wasting my tax dollars to fight over technicalities of how to fund something that we all know must be funded. Has anyone done a study to see how much we are wasting by bringing state unemployment offices to a standstill every 30 days or so? So, instead of showing up each month to rehash the same old and play political games, challenge yourself to set the bar higher and come up with a creative solution that is to the betterment of everyone.

From our viewpoint, you are keeping us from being able to make long-term decisions of how we can make the most of our situations. Will I have enough income to fund continuing education in order to strengthen my chances of getting that job or do I need to save my pennies so that I can put food on the table to feed my kids because I will need that money when my benefits expire. Questions such as, am I better off to not pay my mortgage so that I can stock pile cash for when I lose my home. Knowing that without extended unemployment benefits the threat is real that I'm not going to be able to make it. Can I afford to take my child to the doctor, even though I have health insurance because you still can't afford the \$20 co-payment? Can I donate enough Plasma this month so that I can afford to purchase groceries? Do I file for bankruptcy now or wait until my benefits run out? These issues are real and they are affecting millions of the unemployed daily.

While my own situation isn't as desperate as most (which I thank God for each day), these situations are now happening to individuals that I know or know of. It is hitting too close to home how serious this really is for millions of individuals. All classes of society (educated and unskilled) are being impacted. We are all hovering on the edge of losing it all. It is now time to overcome the series of bad decisions and greed that has brought us to this point, stop blaming each other and set our standards higher and expect more out of ourselves and our government. One of those items is that we address the fact that high unemployment will continue for the next year, or two, and it must be funded. Not to do so would only bring the economy further to its knees and knock out what progress has been made. So quit standing on party lines, stop trying to cut spending in the areas that are important, don't spend money in areas that offer no return on investment, and start doing what will make us a great nation again.

Hard times are now and require resourceful, innovative, and inspiring solutions:

- Offer incentives for Baby Boomers to retire – not having to pay income tax or reducing their tax bracket for the next two to three years if they retire now. Allow them to remain on their current employer's health plans for the next two to three years. This would allow individuals who are currently unemployed to fill those positions that open up and start paying taxes again. (Which they currently are not paying for if they are not earning income.) At least, by the third – fourth year, everyone will be paying taxes again. A slight labor shortage would be better than no jobs at all. At least everyone would be earning and spending.
- Allow the long-term unemployed to establish an account with the Federal government that they can draw against, but with the understanding that it will be paid gradually back once on-going employment is secured. At least individuals will not be losing their homes and will be able to maintain some type of existence beyond living in Tent Cities.

- Offer tuition reductions, or assistance, to allow the unemployed to afford continuing education. Subsidize the educational institutes for the reduction in tuition. America will be continuing to develop its labor force to allow for it to compete in the global market. (But hold individuals responsible to some type of standard to ensure completion and success).
- Give tax cuts to those businesses that add and maintain job growth for the next three years. Do not expire the Bush tax cuts for businesses.
- Do not increase the individual tax brackets. Individuals need to be encouraged to participate in the economy by spending their disposable income so that jobs are being created and goods consumed.
- Offer long term tax incentives to businesses to bring back their labor that has been shifted to overseas with penalties if they are shipped back. Bring back American jobs to the average citizens and do something about keeping those jobs here.

Start addressing the now, but take care of tomorrow so that we all have something to be proud of. It is time to be innovative, get rid of party lines, and do something meaningful for everyone.

Sincerely,

Taunia Gorka